

McGavock House
(Two Rivers Mansion)
3130 McGavock Pike
Donelson
Davidson County
Tennessee

HABS No. TN-15

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

McGAVOCK HOUSE (Two Rivers Mansion)

HABS No. TN-15

Location: 3130 McGavock Pike, Donelson, Davidson County, Tennessee.
Latitude: 36° 11' 22" N. Longitude: 86° 40' 38" W.

Present Owner: Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County.

Present Use: Unoccupied, but contemplated use in future planned
municipal park as a historic museum.

Significance: The Two Rivers mansion, so named because of its position
at the junction of the Stone's and Cumberland Rivers, is
one of the earliest, most significant, and best preserved
of the Italianate houses in Middle Tennessee. It was
built by David H. McGavock in 1859, on land inherited by
his wife, Willie, from her father, William Harding, the
original owner of the Two Rivers estate.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1859 (no further data available).
2. Architect: Two published sources, neither providing any
documentation, provide conflicting identities of the possible
architect of the Two Rivers mansion. The first account,
Caldwell's Historical and Beautiful Country Homes Near Nashville,
Tennessee (Nashville, 1911), relates that "Mr. McGavock was his
own architect and builder, cutting with his own mill all the
timber from trees on the place. . . ." [pages unnumbered]. A
later source, Brandau's History of Homes and Gardens of Tennessee
(Nashville, 1936), observes that "the main mansion house . . . is
said to have been planned by the architect, William Strickland, in
1859 . . ." It should be observed, however, that Strickland died
on April 7, 1854, and had been buried in the walls of the
Tennessee State Capitol for five years when Two Rivers was erected
in 1859. It is conceivable that the author may have had
Strickland's son, Francis, in mind. The latter's name, however,
has not been encountered in any reference or documentation
relating to Two Rivers. In the absence of any documentation
whatever at the present time, it is impossible to identify the
architect of the mansion. However, the great sophistication
apparent in the design and the refinement and integration of its
component details suggest strongly the hand of something more than
an inexperienced amateur. No evidence exists to suggest that
David H. McGavock had the benefit of any prior or comparable
experience in designing the house; at the same time, the details
employed throughout the house and the manner of their composition
are not those customarily seen in William Strickland's known work.

Under the circumstances, it seems appropriate to cite a recent published source which observes that:

"Two Rivers has been compared to Clover Bottom Mansion which was built by Dr. James Hoggatt in 1858. . . . Willie Harding McGavock's grandmother was Rhody Hoggatt Clopton and she probably was Dr. Hoggatt's great-aunt. . . .

The Clover Bottom Mansion does not have the porch extending across the entire front of the house but has only the center part and an upstairs porch supported by columns. It has a large entrance hall, and double parlors on the left as Two Rivers does, but it has a winding stairway at the back of the hall. . . . Back of the double-parlors is a porch straight across the back instead of the L-shaped porch at Two Rivers . . . Two Rivers is the larger of the two houses" [Aiken, op. cit., p. 238].

3. Original and subsequent owners: Built by David H. McGavock on land originally owned by William Harding, the Two Rivers mansion was, until its sale in 1966, owned by the McGavock family.

Willie E. Harding McGavock inherited the Two Rivers farm from her father upon her marriage to David H. McGavock on May 23, 1850 [Aiken, Donelson, Tennessee. Its History and Landmarks. (Nashville, 1968), p. 208].

The Two Rivers estate passed on to David and Willie's son, Frank O. McGavock on March 9, 1891 [RODC Deed Book 153, p. 123].

Spence McGavock, Frank's son, assumed ownership of the Two Rivers estate on March 25, 1907 [RODC Deed Book 353, p. 112].

Spence McGavock married Mary Louise Brandsford in 1928 and gave her Two Rivers as a wedding present [RODC Deed Book 928, p. 678; see also Aiken, op. cit., p. 235].

Mrs. Spence McGavock's mother died in 1933 and the McGavocks moved to Melrose to be with her father. Though her husband died in 1936 and her father died in 1938, Mary Louise McGavock continued to live at Melrose until January 25, 1955, at which time she moved back into the Two Rivers mansion that had been unoccupied in the interim [Aiken, op. cit., p. 236].

Mrs. Spence McGavock died on November 22, 1965. In her will, she bequeathed a principal portion of the Two Rivers estate to Vanderbilt University's School of Medicine and Hospital. The

First American National Bank was named executor of the estate and authorized to sell the property at the most advantageous time [CCODC Will Book 84, p. 537].

With a federal grant of 50% for the cost of acquiring the 447 acres, the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County purchased the estate on October 20, 1966, for \$995,000 [RODC Deed Book 4087, p. 7]. Thirty acres has been allotted for a new high school, presently under construction, and forty-five acres are being developed into thoroughfares. The remainder of the area is being planned as an extensive recreational park. The mansion and the nearby white-painted brick house (1802) are planned to be preserved as historic museums.

4. Builder or contractor, suppliers: All the published sources already cited are unanimous in observing that the brick was made and the stone was quarried on the estate by the McGavock slaves, while the timber was cut and prepared at the sawmill on the estate [see Caldwell, loc. cit., and Brandau, loc. cit.].

A cornerstone reads: "John L. Stewart, Builder of Stone Work, 1859." [see Aiken, op. cit., p. 237].

5. Original plans and construction: No plans or drawings of any kind are known presently to exist.
6. Alterations and additions: There exist only sporadic references to alterations made to the Two Rivers mansion; no documents have been uncovered in this regard.

It has been observed that "the changes (to the Two Rivers mansion) were brought about by Mary Louise Brandsford McGavock, and they largely reflect her tastes and personality" [Walker, "The Two Rivers Mansion," p. 11].

When Mary Louise Brandsford married Spence McGavock and received from him Two Rivers as a wedding present, her father had the house completely redecorated. Bathrooms were added and electricity and steam heat were installed [Aiken, op. cit., p. 235].

A tornado struck the Two Rivers mansion on March 1933. It damaged the roofs and porches, sending debris crashing down to destroy one of the stairways (not identified). [Ibid., p. 237].

Prior to her return in 1955 to Two Rivers from Melrose, where she had resided for 22 years, Mary Louise McGavock had the mansion redecorated [Ibid., p. 236]. An elevator was added in subsequent years [Ibid., p. 238].

- B. Historical Context: Born on September 1, 1826, David H. McGavock was reared on his father's plantation adjoining Belle Meade and educated at the University of Nashville. After spending four years in Arkansas, he returned to Nashville in 1849. The following year, he married his cousin, Willie E. Harding, the only daughter of William Harding, original owner of the Two Rivers farm. This was the first of three generations of McGavocks to occupy the Two Rivers estate.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This residential structure is L-shaped and consists of a house and an ell. It is two stories high with porches in the front and back sides. There is a hip roof on the house.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The two-story, L-shaped building measures approximately 106' x 60'. There is a full basement.
2. Foundations: Dressed stone.
3. Walls: Solid brick walls with common bond with headers every seventh course.
4. Structural system: Wooden truss.
5. Porches: A two-story Italianate porch is on the front elevation, and it consists of the following elements: paneled square columns, a balustrade, and a "heavy" entablature. A pair of simpler two-story porches are on the rear of the house and on the south side of the ell. They have a balustrade and square columns. A bulkhead beneath the rear porches contains a wide corridor adjacent to the basement.
6. Chimneys: Six brick chimneys with stone caps.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Two large wooden, ornate paneled doors at the main entry. The other exterior doors are four paneled with transoms and lintels.

- b. Windows: The house and the ell have double-hung windows with 9-1/4" high lintels and operable shutters. The first level has 4/4 sash. The second level has 6/6 sash.

There are also fancy windows in the house. The one in the second floor front porch is a triple window set within an arch. A label stop tops it. Narrow pilasters with foliated capitals separate each long, narrow round-headed window. The one in the south elevation is similar but has two windows.

- 8. Roof: The house has a hip roof. The ell has a gable roof. Both roofs have metal covering with stand-up seams.
 - a. Cornice: Both the house and the ell have wooden paneled cornices with dentil and sculptured brackets on frieze.
- 9. Exterior stair: The exterior stairs to the basement are at the rear end of the ell portico.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: There are seven spaces in the house, accessible by door openings. The ell part of the house has three spaces which includes the former kitchen.
- b. First floor: A central hall type floor plan is used in the house. The front part of the hall is the entrance hall, and the rear part is the parlor. The stairhall is located in the space between the two bedrooms in the right side of the house. A double ballroom with two fireplaces occupies the entire left side of the house. The ell, which is entered from the rear bedroom in the right side, consists of the following rooms from front to back: stairhall, dining room, kitchen and pantry. There are also two projecting bathroom spaces (later additions) located in the right side of the house with access to the bedrooms.
- c. Second floor plan: The plan is similar to the first floor, except that there is a north-south hall in the central part of the house.

- 2. Stairways: One in the stairhall in the right side of the house and another in the ell.
- 3. Flooring: Original random width flooring on the first level. Modern, narrow oak flooring on the second level. Basement floor is of brick, dirt and wood. Brick size - 8" x 11".

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Wallpapered plaster over solid brick. The ceilings are wood lath and plaster covered with paper.
 5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Large, four panel wooden doors with operable transoms throughout.
 - b. Windows: (Not recorded).
 6. Special decorative features: Elaborate moldings at the door heads and jambs on the first level. 16" high baseboards on the first level.
 7. Mechanical equipment: None. Modern heating, lighting and plumbing.
- D. Site:
1. General setting and orientation: The house faces east, 220 yards west of McCavock Pike.
 2. Outbuildings: Near the southwest corner of the mansion is the original McGavock residence, a small white-painted brick structure built by William Harding.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Early Views: W.W. Clayton's History of Davidson County, Tennessee, with illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men (Philadelphia, 1880), provides an exterior sketch of the mansion. (page number not indicated).

A photograph of the mansion, showing the front exterior view and indicating the absence of an elaborate formal garden developed in front of the house at some later date, appears in Caldwell's Historical and Beautiful Homes near Nashville, Tennessee (Nashville, 1911), (page number not indicated).

A photograph providing a view of the facade and illustrating the formal garden which had by then been created in front of the house was published in Brandau's History of Homes and Gardens of Tennessee (Nashville, 1936). (page number not indicated).

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

County Clerk's Office for Davidson County, Tennessee
Will Book 54, p. 91
Will Book 84, p. 537

Register's Office for Davidson County, Tennessee
Deed Book 153, p. 123
Deed Book 353, p. 112
Deed Book 928, p. 678
Deed Book 4087, p. 7

2. Secondary and published sources:

Aiken, Leona Taylor. "Two Rivers, Donelson, Tennessee. Its History and Landmarks (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingsport Press, 1968), pp. 231-241; see also pp. 14, 27, 40, and 208; for "Priestley's Academy for Young Ladies," see pp. 255-257].

Brandau, Roberta S. ed. "Two Rivers Farm, Nashville, History of Homes and Gardens of Tennessee (Nashville, Tenn.: Partheon Press, 1936). (page number not indicated).

Caldwell, Mrs. James E. (May Winston). "Two Rivers, Historical and Beautiful Country Homes near Nashville, Tennessee (Nashville, Tenn.: Brandon Printing Co., 1911), two pages, unnumbered.

Clayton, W. W. History of Davidson County, Tennessee, with illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1880): "David McCavock," pp. 425-426; "Francis McCavock," pp. 426-427.

Federal Writers' Project, Tennessee. A Guide to the State (New York: Viking Press, 1939), p. 452.

Walker, Hugh F. "The Two Rivers Mansion: Its History and a Plan for its Role in the Community." Submitted by the author, the County Historian, to the Park Board of Metropolitan Nashville on June 1, 1968.

Prepared by: Anatole Senkevitch, Jr.
Architectural Historian
and Architect
National Park Service
Summer 1970

Roy C. Pledger
HABS Project Supervisor
Summer 1970

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project, which was done in June-August 1970, was the result of cooperation between the National Park Service, Tennessee Historical Commission and the Historic Sites Federation of Tennessee. The following are the people involved in the documentation of the Two Rivers Mansion: James C. Massey, Chief of HABS; Roy C. Pledger (Texas A & M University), Project Supervisor; Anatole Senkevitch, Jr. (University of Virginia), Architectural Historian; student architects: Robert J. Dunay (Virginia Polytechnic Institute), William H. Edwards (University of Illinois), Donald W. Graham, Jr. (University of Illinois), and Donna G. Woodrum (Virginia Polytechnic Institute). Also, Rick Du Flocq and Patrick W. Crawford did some work on the drawings.

Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, took the photographs of the mansion in August 1970.

The written data was edited in August 1985 by Susan McCown, HABS Architectural Historian in the Washington, D.C. office, for transmittal to the Library of Congress.